The art and cultural scene in Singapore has changed a lot since I started making art in 1997. I don't think anyone can deny the fact that Singapore's government is one of the very few in Southeast Asia that has progressively encouraged the local growth of art, architecture, culture and design over the past 25 years. Looking back, my entire journey as an artist has been heavily assisted by cultural policies, which have produced the institutions that have served as cornerstones in the evolution of my practice.

For example, since 1999, Singapore's National Arts Council (NAC) has supplied me with grants to participate in art fairs, biennials, conferences, exhibitions and residencies abroad, enabling me to build a network that allows me access to even more of these art events and festivals. The Substation, an independent art space founded in 1990 by the late theater doyen Kuo Pao Kun, was the first building funded by the NAC's Arts Housing Scheme and was also the first place where I showed my work. There, I tested out many of the ideas behind my subsequent exhibitions. The NAC is also commissioner of the Singapore Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, where I was invited to represent my country at the 50th edition in 2003. The list goes on.

As I was writing this, a new post appeared on my Facebook page. It was written by Tay Kheng Soon, a visionary architect and thinker who has since the late 1950s been extremely vocal and active in introducing his own voice and that of his peers into the Singaporean discourse. He said, "What is the universal message of Singapore? As a 'poison shrimp,' it can only inspire dread. As a successful authoritarian social engineer, it gives encouragement to visionary bureaucrats. What will inspire an inspiring country's own political realities. As such, all under the guise of an art project. This, of course, is nothing new and I'm not the first to think of this. But what if the idea of an "art school" isn't exactly a school? What if this school becomes something that has no apparent start or end, or is woven into the very fabric of the everyday? A place where artists can come together and teach each other something—and for free!

As a start, perhaps, one of the things to do as a Singaporean artist is to begin to fuel one's own political imagination and, in turn, to persuade others to imagine along with you—not as a way of generating power or gaining access into politics, but really, to activate imaginations in terms of thinking about how Singapore can become a great place for artists, critics, curators, thinkers and writers to gather, to discuss, to make, to improvise thinking in different ways and to develop alternatives in making things.

In the NUS Museum, there is a small room on the ground floor. On the glass door, you can find a quote by Mashadi: "Things that may or may not happen." Uncertainty is something that Singapore is never good at. Singaporeans are often risk averse. Now is the time to take a step forward and embrace risk and uncertainty. Without these, we will never be able to make any important discoveries about art, ourselves or the world at large.

**ILLUSTRATION BY ELLA ZHENG**

See our website for Arabic and Chinese versions of this article.